

The duke abruptly left the room, slamming the door after him.

Cardinal Bernis saw his departure with an expression of sadness.

“And such are the friendships of man,” he murmured to himself; “the slightest offence is sufficient to destroy a friendship of many years. Well, we must reconcile ourselves to it,” he continued after a pause, “and, at all events, it has its very diverting side. For many months I have taken pains to support Grimaldi with the pope in his defence of the Jesuits, and now that celebrated order will be abolished because a French cook has bought a fish that was too dear for the Spanish cook! By what small influences are the destinies of mankind decided!

“But now I have not a moment to lose,” continued the cardinal, rousing himself from his troubled thoughts. “Grimaldi has rendered it impossible for me longer to oppose the views of the Marquise de Pompadour; I must now give effect to the commands of my feminine sovereign, and announce to the pope the assent of France to his policy. To the pope, then, the letter of the marquise may make known the will of Louis!”

The cardinal hastily donned his official costume, and ordered his carriage for a visit to the Vatican.

CHAPTER XXVII.

POPE GANGANELLI (CLEMENT XIV).

Two men were walking up and down in the garden of the Quirinal, engaged in a lively discourse. One of them was an old man of more than sixty years. Long white locks waved about his forehead, falling like a halo on both sides of his cheeks. An infinite mildness and clearness looked out from his dreamy eyes, and a smile of infinite kindness played about his mouth, but so full of sorrow and resignation that it filled one's heart with sadness and his eyes with tears. His tall, herculean form was bent and shrunken; age had broken it, but could not take away that noble and dignified expression which distinguished that old man and involuntarily impelled every one to reverence and a sort of adoration. To his friends and admirers this old man seemed a super-terrestrial being, and often in their enthusiasm they called him their Saviour, the again-visible Son of God! The old man would smile at this, and say: “You are right in one respect, I am indeed a son of God, as you all are, but when you compare me with our Saviour, it can only be to the crucified. I am, indeed, a crucified person like Him, and have suffered many torments. But I have also overcome many.”

And, when so speaking, there lay in his face an almost celestial clearness and joyfulness, which would impel one involuntarily to bow down before him, had he not been, as he was, the vicegerent of God upon earth, the Pope Ganganelli.

The man who was now walking with him formed a singular contrast with the mild, reverence-commanding appearance of the pope. He was a man of forty, with a wild, glowing-red face, whose eyes flashed with malice and rage, whose mouth gave evidence of sensuality and barbarity, and whose form was more appropriate for a Vulcan than a prince of the Church. And yet he was such, as was manifested by his dress, by the great cardinal's hat over his shoulder, and by the flashing cross of brilliants upon his breast. This cardinal was very well known, and whenever his name was mentioned it was with secret curses, with a sign of the cross, and a prayer to God for aid in avoiding him, the terror of Rome, the Cardinal Albani.

Sighing and reluctantly had the pope finally resolved to have the cardinal near his person, that he might attempt by mild and gentle persuasion to soften his stubborn disposition; but the cardinal had replied to all his gentle words only with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, with low murmured words, with a darkly clouded brow.

"It is in no one's power to change and make a new being of himself," he finally said, in a harsh tone, as the pope continued his exhortations and representations. "You, my blessed father, cannot convert yourself into a monster such as you describe me; and I, Cardinal Albani, cannot attain to the sublime godliness which we all admire in your holiness. Every one must walk in his own path, taking especial care not to disturb others in theirs."

"But that is exactly what you do," gently replied Ganganelli. "All the streets of Rome bear witness to it. Did you not yesterday, in one of these streets, with force and

arms rescue a bandit from the hands of justice, and with your murderous dagger take the life of the servant of the law?"

"They wanted to lead one of my servants to death, who had done nothing more than obey my commands," vehemently responded the cardinal. "I liberated him from their hands as was natural; and if some of the *sbirri* were killed in the encounter, that was their fault. Why did they not voluntarily give up their prisoner and then run away?"

"And was it really your command that this bandit fulfilled?" asked the pope, shuddering. "You know he killed a young nobleman, the pride and hope of his family, and was caught in the act, which he did not attempt to deny?"

"That young nobleman had mocked and made a laughing-stock of me in a public company," calmly replied the cardinal; "hence it was natural that he must die. Revenge is the first duty of man, and whoever neglects to take it is dishonored!"

"And such men dare to call themselves Christians!" exclaimed Ganganelli, with uplifted arms—"and such men call themselves priests of the religion of love!"

"I am a priest of love!" said Albani.

"But of what love?" responded the pope, with an appearance of agitation—"the priest of a wild, beastly passion, of a rough animal inclination. You know nothing of the soft and silent love that ennobles the heart and strengthens it for holy resolutions; which inculcates virtue and decency, and lifts up the eyes to heaven—of that love which is full of consolation and blessed hope, and desires nothing for itself."

"God save me from such a love!" said the cardinal, crossing himself. "When I love, I desire much, and of virtue and perfection there is, thank God, no question."

"Repent, amend, Francesco," said the pope. "I promised your uncle, the very worthy Cardinal Alessandro Albani, once more to attempt the course of mildness, and exhort you to return to the path of virtue. Ah, could you have seen the poor old man, with tears streaming from his blind eyes—tears of sorrow for you, whom he called his lost son!"

"My uncle did very wrong so to weep," said the cardinal. "Blind as he was he yet kept a mistress.* How, then, can he wonder that I, who can see, kept several? Two eyes see more than none; that is natural!"

"But do you, then, so wholly forget your solemn oath of chastity and virtue?" excitedly exclaimed the pope. "Look upon the cross that covers your breast, and fall upon your knees to implore the pardon of God."

"This cross was laid upon my breast when I was yet a boy," gloomily responded the cardinal; "the fetters were attached to me before I had the strength to rend them; my will was not asked when this stone was laid upon my breast! Now I ask not about your will when I seek, under this weight, to breathe freely as a man! And, thank God, this weight has not crushed my heart—my heart, that yet glows with youthful freshness, and in which love has found a lurking-hole which your cross cannot fill up. And in this lurking-hole now dwells a charming, a wonderful woman,

* Joseph Gorani's "Secret Memoirs of the Italian Courts," vol. ii., p 131.

whom Rome calls the queen of song, and whom I call the queen of beauty and love! All the world adjudges her the crown of poesy, and only you refuse it to her."

"Again this old complaint!" said the pope, with a slight contraction of his brow. "You again speak of her—"

"Of Corilla," interposed the cardinal—"yes, of Corilla I speak, of that heavenly woman whom all the world admires; to whose beautiful verses philosophers and poets listen with breathless delight, and who well deserves that you should reward her as a queen by bestowing upon her the poetic crown!"

"I crown a Corilla!" mockingly exclaimed the pope. "Shall a Corilla desecrate the spot hallowed by the feet of Tasso and Petrarch? No, I say, no; when art becomes the plaything of a courtesan, then may the sacred Muses veil their heads and mourn in silence, but they must not degrade themselves by throwing away the crown which the best and noblest would give their heart's blood to obtain. This Corilla may bribe you poor earthly fools with her smiles and amorous verses, but she will not be able to deceive the Muses!"

"You refuse me, then, the crowning of the renowned improvisatrice Corilla?" asked the cardinal, with painfully suppressed rage.

"I refuse it!"

"And why, then, did you send for me?" exclaimed the cardinal with vehemence. "Was it merely to mock me?"

"It was for the purpose of warning you, my son!" mildly responded the pope. "For even the greatest forbearance must at length come to an end; and when I am

compelled to forget that you are Alessandro Albani's nephew, I shall then only have to remember that you are the criminal Francesco Albani, whom all the world condemns, and whom I must judge! Repent and reform, my son, while there is yet time; and, above all things, renounce this love, which heaps new disgrace upon your family and overwhelms your relatives with sorrow and anxiety!"

"Renounce Corilla!" cried the cardinal. "I tell you I love her, I adore her, this heavenly, beautiful woman! How can you ask me to renounce her?"

"Nevertheless I do demand it," said the pope with solemnity, "demand it in the name of your father, in the name of God, against whose holy laws you have sinned—you, His consecrated priest."

"But that is an impossibility!" passionately exclaimed Francesco. "One must bear a heart of stone in his bosom to require it; and that you can do so only proves that you have never known what it is to love!"

"And that I can do so should prove to you that I have indeed known it, my son!" sadly responded the pope.

"Whoever has known love knows that there can be no renunciation!"

"And whoever has known love can renounce!" exclaimed the pope, with animation. "Listen to me, my son, and may the sad story of a short happiness and long expiation serve you as a warning example! You think I cannot have known love? Ah, I tell you I have experienced all its joys and all its sorrows—that in the intoxication of rapture I once forgot my vows, my duties, my holy resolutions, and, doubly criminal, I also taught her whom I loved to forget

her own sacred duties and consent to sin! Ah, you call me a saint, and yet I have been the most abject of sinners! Under this Franciscan vesture beat a tempestuous, fiery heart that derided God and His laws; a heart that would have given my soul to the evil one, had he promised to give me in exchange the possession of my beloved! She was beautiful, and of a heavenly disposition; and hence, when she passed through the aisles of the church, with her slight fairy form, her angelic face veiled by her long dark locks, her eyes beaming with love and pleasure, a heavenly smile playing about her lips—ah, when she thus passed through the church, her feet scarcely touching the floor, then I, who awaited her in the confessional, felt myself nearly frantic with ecstasy, my brain turned, my eyes darkened, there was a buzzing in my ears, and I attempted to implore the aid and support of God."

"You should have appealed to Cupid!" said the cardinal, laughing. "In such a case aid could come only from the god of ancient Rome, not of the modern!"

The old man noticed not his words. Wholly absorbed in his reminiscences, he listened only to the voice of his own breast, saw only the form of the beautiful woman he had once so dearly loved!

"God listened not to my fervent prayers," he continued, with a sigh, "or perhaps my stormily beating heart heard not the voice of God, because I listened only to her; because with intoxicated senses I was listening to the modest, childish pure confession which she, kneeling in the confessional, was whispering in my ears; because I felt her breath upon my cheeks and in every trembling nerve of my

being. And one day, overcome by his glowing passion, the monk so far forgot his sworn duty as to confess his immodest and insane love for the wife of another man!"

"Ah, she was, then, married?" remarked the cardinal.

"Yes, she was married; sold by her own parents, sacrificed at the shrine of mammon, married to a man whom she did not and could not love, and who pursued her with an insane jealousy. Ah, she suffered and suffered with the uncomplaining calmness of an angel. And I, did I not also suffer? We wept together, we complained together, until our hearts at length forgot complaining, and an unspeakable, a terrible happiness, made us forget our troubles. I had forgotten all—my God, my clerical vows; she also had forgotten all—her husband, her vow of fidelity; and if a thought of these things sometimes intruded upon our moments of happiness, it only caused us to plunge into new delights, and to lull ourselves anew into a blessed forgetfulness!"

"And the good, jealous husband remarked nothing?" asked the cardinal.

"He remarked nothing! He loved me, he confided in me, he called me his friend; and when he was compelled to take a long journey, he confided to me his house and his wife, establishing me as the guard of her virtue!"

The cardinal broke out into loud laughter. "These good husbands," said he, "they are all alike to a hair. Every one has a friend in whom he confides, and it is that very friend who betrays him. They must all fulfil their

destinies, these good husbands! Relate further, holy father! Your story is very entertaining. I am curious to hear the end!"

"The end was terrible, replete with horror and shame," said the pope. "We lived blessed days, heavenly nights. Oh, we were so happy that we hardly had a thought for our criminality, but only for our love. One night there was a knocking at the closed door of the house, and we shudderingly recognized the voice of the husband demanding admission."

"And you were not at all in a situation to grant it to him," laughingly interposed the cardinal. "He might, perhaps, have been not a little astonished, this good husband, that you watched by night as well as by day the temple of his wedded happiness."

"With tears of anguish and terror she conjured me to fly, to save her from the derision of the world and the anger of her husband. She led me to a secret stairway, and I, like a madman pursued by the furies, was hastening to descend, when my foot slipped and I fell down the stairs with a loud clattering noise. I felt the blood oozing from my breast and pouring from my mouth in a warm stream—my limbs pained me frightfully—but I picked myself up and with extremest suffering fled to my cloister, when, having reached my cell, I fell senseless. A long illness now confined me to my bed and tortured my body with frightful pains; but far more frightful were the tortures of my soul, more frightful the voices that day and night whispered to me of my crime and guiltiness! My conscience was fully awakened; it spoke to me in a voice of thunder, and like a

worm I turned upon my bed of pain, imploring of God a little mercy for the torments that burned my brain! This time God permitted Himself to be found by me; I heard his voice, saying: 'Go and repent, and thy sins shall be forgiven thee! Shake off the sinfulness that weighs upon thy head, and peace will return to thy bosom.' I heard this voice of God, and wept with repentant sorrow. I vowed to obey and reconcile myself to God by renouncing my love and never again seeing its object! It was a great sacrifice, but God demanded it, and I obeyed!"

"That is, this sickness had restored you from intoxication to sobriety; you were tired of your mistress!"

"I had, perhaps, never loved her more warmly, more intensely, than in those dreadful hours when I was struggling with my poor tortured heart and imploring God for strength to renounce her and separate myself from her forever. But God was merciful and aided my weakness with His own strength. Letters came from her, and I had the cruel courage to read them; I had condemned myself to do it as an expiation, and while I read her soft complainings, her love-sorrows, I felt in my heart the same sorrows, the same disconsolate wretchedness; tears streamed from my eyes, and I flayed my breast with my nails in utter despair! Ah, at such moments how often did I forget God and my repentance; how often did I press those letters to my lips and call my beloved by the tenderest names; my whole soul, my whole being flew to her, and, forgetting all, all, I wanted to rush to her presence, fall down at her feet, and be blessed only through her, even if my eternal salvation were thereby lost! But what was it, what then restrained

my feet, what suddenly arrested those words of insane passion upon my lips and irresistibly drew me down upon my knees to pray? It was God, who then announced Himself to me—God, who called me to himself—God, who finally gave me strength to withstand my love and always leave her letters unanswered until they finally ceased to come—until her complaints, which, however, had consoled me, were no longer heard! The sacrifice was made, God accepted it, my sin was expiated, and I was glad, for my heart was forever broken, and never, since then, has a smile of happiness played upon my lips. But in my soul has it become tranquil and serene, God dwells there, and within me is a peace known only to those who have struggled and overcome, who have expiated their sins with a free will and flayed breast."

"And your beloved, what became of her?" asked the cardinal. "Did she pardon your treason, and console herself in the arms of another?"

"In the arms of death!" said Ganganelli, with a low voice. "My silence and my apparent forgetfulness of her broke her heart; she died of grief, but she died like a saint, and her last words were: 'May God forgive him, as I do! I curse him not, but bless him, rather; for through him am I released from the burden of this life, and all sorrow is overcome!' She therefore died in the belief of my unfaithfulness; she did, indeed, pardon me, but yet she believed me a faithless betrayer! And the consciousness of this was to me a new torment and a penance which I shall suffer forever and ever! This is the story of my love," continued Ganganelli, after a short silence. "I have truly related it

to you as it is.* May you, my son, learn from it that, when we wish to do right, we can always succeed, in spite of our own hearts and sinful natures, and that with God's help we can overcome all and suffer all. You see that I have loved, and nevertheless had strength to renounce. But it was God who gave me this strength, God alone! Turn you, also, to God; pray to Him to destroy in you your sinful love; and, if you implore Him with the right words, and with the right fervor, then will God be near you with His strength, and in the pains of renunciation will He purify your soul, preparing it for virtue and all that is good!"

"And do you call that virtue?" asked the cardinal. "May Heaven preserve me from so cruel a virtue! Do you call it serving God when this virtue makes you the murderer of your beloved, and, more savage than a wild beast, deaf to the amorous complaints of a woman whom you led into love and sin, whose virtue you sacrificed to your lust, and whom you afterward deserted because, as you say, God called to yourself, but really only, because satiated, you no longer desired her. Your faithlessness cunningly clothes itself in the mantle of godliness, nothing further. No, no, holy father of Christendom, I envy you not this virtue which has made you the murderer of God's noblest work. That is a sacrilege committed in the holy temple of nature. Go your way, and think yourself great in your bloodthirsty, murderous virtue! You will not convert me to it. Let me still remain a sinner—it at least will not lead me to murder the woman I love, and provide for her torment and suffer-

* Joseph Gorani, "Secret Memoirs," vol. ii., p. 26.

ing, instead of the promised pleasure. Believe me, Corilla has never yet cursed me, nor have her fine eyes ever shed a tear of sorrow on my account. You have made your beloved an unwilling saint and martyr—possibly that may have been very sublime, and the angels may have wept or rejoiced over it. I have lavished upon my beloved ones nothing but earthly happiness. I have not made them saints, but only happy children of this world; and even when they have ceased to love me, they have always continued to call me their friend, and blessed me for making them rich and happy. You have set a crown of thorns upon the head of your beloved, I would bind a laurel-crown upon the beautiful brow of my Corilla, which will not wound her head, and will not cause her to die of grief. You are not willing to aid me in this, my work? You refuse me this laurel-wreath because you have only martyr-crowns to dispose of? Very well, holy father of Christendom, I will nevertheless compel you to comply with my wishes, and you shall have no peace in your holy city from my mad tricks until you promise me to crown the great improvisatrice in the capitol. Until then, *addio*, holy father of Christendom. You will not see me again in the Vatican or Quirinal, but all Rome shall ring with news of me!"

With a slight salutation, and without waiting for an answer from the pope, the cardinal departed with hasty steps, and soon his herculean form disappeared in the shadow of the pine and olive trees. But his loud and scornful laugh long resounded in the distance.